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## News

### Transportation woes may spread to Mohave

By JOHN RUDOLF/TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

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Looming shortfalls in two key transportation funds may seriously derail road construction throughout Arizona, including Mohave County, according to statements by state transportation department officials and Gov. Janet Napolitano.

"We are at a funding crossroads and must take action now to address our most critical transportation needs," said Arizona Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez, in a recent letter to members of the State Transportation Board.

The two federal and state transportation funds that make up the bulk of Arizona's highway spending face potential shortfalls that may ultimately ripple out to affect projects in Mohave County.

According to ADOT, the Highway Account of the federal Highway Trust Fund faces a \$3.3 billion deficit for fiscal year 2009. While a federal legislative fix is in the works, it is currently stalled in the U.S. Senate. ADOT spokesman Timothy Tait said that while it was expected that a short-term solution would be worked out on the federal level, the long-term stability of federal funding was a source of concern.

"We're trying to avoid surprises by talking about these issues in advance," Tait said. Were the \$3.3 billion shortfall not met, Arizona would face a loss of about \$228 million in funding, and 8,000 related jobs, according to data from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

The ability of federal funds to keep pace with Arizona's skyrocketing growth rates is another concern. At present, Arizona is a "donor" state — receiving back only about 92 cents on each dollar of gas taxes paid to the federal government.

"The needs across the state of Arizona are far outpacing the funding that's available," said Tait.

At the same time, state highway funds — generated by gas taxes — are also failing to meet Arizona's growing transportation needs. Napolitano said the shortfall could lead to a maintenance-only budget for the transportation department in as little as three years.

For that reason, Napolitano has thrown her support behind a voter initiative working its way toward a place on the ballot in November that would raise the state sales tax by one cent. Revenue from the tax hike, estimated at \$42.5 billion over 30 years, would fund a state transportation plan, including highways, rail and other transportation solutions.

With the state's population expected to reach four million new residents in the coming years, Napolitano said that transportation was among her top concerns.

"If you're going to add four million more people, you've got to be thinking about how they're going to get around," she said.

During a recent visit to Lake Havasu City, Napolitano urged voters to support the initiative in November, saying it would help rural counties equally with more urban areas.

"This is a way to really have a transportation infrastructure here that will meet your growth needs," Napolitano said. "This will improve your chances for economic development because you'll have greater access to different types of markets. It will also assist tourism."

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